

# 'The Challenge of World Revolution to Christian Education

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In common with most terms, the word 'revolution' has undergone a radical change in connotation, especially during the relatively brief period of American national history. There was a day when it signified a noble and brave effort of liberty-loving colonials to free themselves from the lordship of a distant and tyrannical imperialism. Today, the word bears no glamor save that of receding history; rather it connotes upheaval, disintegration and pulverization.

Whether we like it or no, forces of revolution have been unleashed against the Western world -- forces in the faces of which only the blind can be optimistic. Revolution is everywhere. To quote:

Revolution is in Russia, with the gaping windows of Leningrad, with the fear-filled eyes of the former middle classes, with the iron-willed extermination of the ancient nobility. Revolution is India, with the mystic Gandhi pressing himself on the bayonets of the world's mightiest empire, with an unarmed but swarming people daring the shambles of a hundred Amritsars, with the handloom crying death to the power-driven spindle. Revolution is Africa, with the black man beginning to stand up to the white, with the white amazed and furious and apprehensive, with the black outraged and desperate and ready for any death-grapple. Revolution is all that the word implies.<sup>1</sup>

True, revolution implies both the negative and destructive elements of change and the positive and constructive phases which build upon what remains after the cataclysm. But it is to the negative and the disintegrating to which our thought is inevitably turned in our own generation. Some of us have wondered, *why* the convulsions which have shaken the world of government during the past half century? Is it but an accident that the tyrannies of

the days of Nero and of the medieval ages have reappeared, with almost fanatical fury, even during our recollection? Is it by accident that such movements as those led by Hitler and Stalin have grown up amidst the dream-castles of an idealizing twentieth century?

It has been difficult to sift the facts concerning the atrocities which have followed in the wake of revolutionary movements in totalitarian states. But a few years ago, we who are yet young were gravely assured that the tales which reached us of atrocities in Russia since 1917 were but the propaganda of a die-hard capitalism. So likewise were the accounts of the tyrannies of the Fascists and the Nazis, in the early days of their *coups d'etat*, relegated by the critics of our own order to the realm of propaganda in favor of the status quo. With the seeping-forth of the facts, we are forced to the conclusion that "the half was not told us."

A generation which brought us into this disordered world has tried in vain to assure us that we were but passing through the "birth pangs of a new age," that humanity moves in cycles, and that we are not to be surprised at occasional convulsions within the race; that there is no cause for alarm --- that we are but to mature our faith in the inherent goodness of man, and all will be well. We have not until recently at least, been warned that during the past ten decades, there have been released ideological forces which threaten to destroy our civilization, and to further drench the soil of our Western world with the blood of young men and women now living.

It is more than a coincidence that the international upheavals of our century have been more than outbreaks of military might. The two fallen dictators of western

<sup>1</sup>Paul Hutchinson, *World Revolution and Religion*, p. 14.

Europe utilized weapons only when their war of ideas needed their support; their major source of reliance was upon a philosophy of culture which sought to break the continuity of the present with the past, and to erect "new orders" upon the basis of well-knit systems of ideas. Sovietism likewise, while keeping a sword always at its side, seeks to exploit to the limit the power of ideas. Here, as was the case with Fascist collectivism, the appeal is to a philosophy oriented, not in the concepts of the civilization which we have known as 'Christian' but in a context of gross materialism. In this connection, it should be noted that among the disciples of Hegel, only Marx is making history. Those who sought to retain any transcendental elements, especially Strauss and Feuerbach, fell by the wayside.<sup>2</sup>

The relevance of this to the field of Christian education is apparent when we notice that the theories upon which today's revolutionaries proceed are concerned, not only with radical readjustments in the fields of governments and economics, but with the complete elimination of both spiritual institutions and the spiritual values upon which they rest. Strictly speaking, Marxism would expect these values to wither automatically, as the economic structure of which they are a reflex is replaced by another. Practically, however, contemporary Marxism finds it necessary to move aggressively against all forms of religious faith, and with particular vigor against organized Christianity.

It should be noted here that it is scarcely possible for the thinking person longer to regard Fascism as in radical antithesis to Communism. The events of recent years indicate clearly that these systems (regardless of the extent to which they use one another as scape-goats) represent a united front against not only free government, but against the legitimacy of any claim of Christ against those of Caesar. Nor can it be maintained that the opposition of Sovietism is simply a reaction against the Eastern

Orthodox form of Christianity. Religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular, is of such a nature that it cannot fail to clash with modern collectivist revolutionary movements. Its only alternative is to submerge itself and to lose its distinctive character. It is in the very nature of religion to be conservative,<sup>3</sup> which fact alone is sufficient to excite the enmity of the totalitarian system, with its claim to establish new and independent norms and its emphasis upon violent social and economic change. The forces of world revolution have as a cardinal tenet the necessity of the regimentation of child training. It is fairly easy to sit in languid complacency in the United States and to feel that "since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were;" but were we to be transplanted to the areas behind the Iron Curtain there to consider practically the subject of religious education, we should wake up with a tremendous start. We do well, therefore, to note the points of strength in the program of world revolution (for no thinking person will pretend that the movement which is afoot in Eastern Europe is not designed ultimately to comprehend all existing governments); it is unthinkable that the leaders in Communist-dominated countries have not evaluated the potentialities of child-training.

Those of us who are vitally interested in the perpetuation of the Christian religion, and in the preservation of the Christian Church, need to face the facts concerning the inefficiency of our program of Christian education. We need to contrast its lack of zeal with the aggressive *élan* of revolutionary movements, no less than to find (if possible) a correct attitude toward them.

The curse of totalitarianism lies in its regimentation, especially its regimentation of youth. One cannot but wonder how Communism would flourish, were it to act upon the same assumptions, and to proceed by the same methods, which underlie present-day programs for religious education. Suppose the instructors of its regimented

<sup>2</sup>Emil Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization*, pp. 33, 99.

<sup>3</sup>Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

youth themselves considered much of its ideological literature a forgery. Suppose they thought, to take an absurd example, that those parts purporting to have been written by Marx have been in reality written since his day, and palmed off as the work of Karl Marx to give them weight of authority. Would this be impressive?

Rather, totalitarianism demands a positive content in its program of education. Recognizing that thought patterns harden and character crystallizes in children and early adolescents, it drafts its children, separates them from possible pluralistic education in the homes, and organizes them into units devoted to systematic and uniform indoctrination. There they are deliberately exposed to contempt for old restraints, and taught to adopt the inspired word of revolutionaries. Not for an hour are they permitted to forget the régime. They "eat revolutionary, sleep revolutionary, work revolutionary, and play revolutionary."

The inadequacy of much of present-day religious education is the more apparent by contrast. Let us visualize a scene, which while not characteristic of all or even most religious education units, is one which we must admit to be all too common. It is nine-thirty o'clock on Sunday morning. A disorderly opening exercise of the Church School has dragged by. Just as the classes retire to their places of meeting, the teacher of the class for adolescents arrives, breathless and still sleepy. Not less than eight minutes of the remaining half-hour must be devoted to the process of getting the group quieted down. An ill-prepared lesson from a quarterly whose editors are themselves uncertain concerning the validity of the Book from which the lesson comes, drags out the remaining twenty minutes. Possibly the teacher has acquired some degree of familiarity with the material, possibly not. The discussion begins somewhere and ends nowhere. The hour closes, and the pupils file out of the Church, while but a corporal's guard of them remain for the service of worship.

Few of us have not witnessed the presence of such conditions. The marvel is, not that Christianity has gone no further, but

that it has survived at all. This is not a plea for a religious regimentation of youth. Herod can scarcely be defeated by herodism. Is it not, however, apparent that if Christianity is to make an impact upon a world of growing regimentation, it must have a message of vitality? Must this message not be presented by those who have been fired by its ideals, persuaded of the unique and supreme claim of its Christ, and prepared to devote some adequate amount of time to its comprehension and propagation?

World revolutionary movements frankly aim at two things; the perpetuation of themselves, and the disintegration of existing governments. In other words, the motives are, first, self-preservation and, second, propagation. This gives to Christian Education at least a suggestion for her own aims. Perpetuation of an institution or of a system of thought demands indoctrination. This is a pedagogical principle which is allowed in every secular field; why should it be disallowed in the field of Christian education? This demands a body of normative material, a system of belief if you please.

Christianity, while it is intimately concerned with institutionalism, ought nevertheless to be understood to consist primarily in a system of belief, rather than in an ecclesiastical system. Much of Christian education has doubtless been nullified by its insistence upon the peculiarities of the denomination, rather than a general insistence upon the underlying principles of the Christian religion. And in insisting upon basic tenets, certainly the children of light ought to be no less wise than the children of darkness.

Again, revolutionary movements aim to capitalize upon every element that will make for their advancement. Communism loves economic dislocation and consequent discontent. It loves to see the rise of oppressors, and to utilize reactions against them. It seems to delight to see racial discrimination, and then to present an appeal upon the basis of racial equality. It recognizes the impressional character of youth; it knows the value of the slogan, the catchword and the generalization.

More specific emphasis is necessary at this point upon the problem of content in Christian education. It has become fashionable in certain circles to place content and method in antithesis, or at least to reduce the former to a place of relative unimportance. From an emphasis upon the transmission of a body of normative teaching, much of contemporary religious education has turned to a 'problem-centered approach', 'experiments in creative living' and the like. The vulnerability of much of so-called progressive education has been, and is being, exposed in other contexts. One wonders, however, how contemporary revolutionary movements would advance if they abandoned their policy of the communication of a hard core of doctrine, and turned to the discovery of 'truth' by the method of pooled experience. Would they wish to discover their norms from the community of response of their followers to their environment? Would they trust their youth to achieve a 'common reality' as a social triumph through the sharing of youthful experiences? Would they wait in patience for the emergence of new patterns of conceptual formulation, by which their devotees would deal with the growing horizons of the world?

Rather, the movement for world revolution grows by the method of direct indoctrination of its followers in the *credo* of its apostles. It thrives on simplification, even upon oversimplification. Parenthetically, one might note at this point that Communism's attack upon Christianity is frequently based upon such generalizations as: Christianity and Capitalism are one in exploiting the common man; Christianity is a bourgeoisie institution; Christianity is a white man's religion and the tool of white supremacy; and, Christianity is favorable to "Capitalism and war". This is not the place for a refutation of such allegations. What is important to this discussion is, that world revolution does not seek truth within the successive reconstruction of dynamic human experience.

Our Faith is facing a world movement which flourishes upon generalizations and false catchwords. It capitalizes upon the

lack of thought upon the part of the masses. If Christianity is to point a path through the labyrinth of the world's muddled thought, there must first be clear thinking upon the part of its leaders and its officers for instruction.

Moreover, Christianity faces a growing tide of prejudice, prejudice which has but a shallow foundation in fact. Whether it shall be able to meet these prejudices with facts depends upon the vision of her leaders. But before we can proceed to some general principles which must guide her leaders, it is necessary to view the present situation with respect to the attitude of the Christian world toward its Source-Book.

For the past few decades, progressive thought has been largely cast in the mould expressed by the ambiguous term, "evolution." Uniformitarianism has held the field. By an unwarranted process by which "natural law" was made all-explanatory God was virtually excluded from His universe. Happily, this extreme form of evolutionary dogmatism has undergone modification, so that much of recent criticism of 'evolution' has been in the nature of fogging a dead horse.

It is significant that scientists are more ready to back-track and to revise their hypotheses than are the theologians. In few fields has the application of the concept of 'progress' been more fearlessly applied than in biblical criticism. Acting upon the assumption that the Hebrew religion shared a naturalistic origin common to that of contemporary religious systems, and that its ideas had a development parallel to those in the religions of environing nations, the Hebrew Scriptures were treated as a guilty prisoner at the bar. They were virtually disallowed as witnesses on their own behalf. Any statement in them which seemed to interfere with the unilinear development of thought was excised from its setting, and relegated to a much later time, when, it was conjectured, the system had developed sufficiently far to permit the existence of such an idea.

The application of the developmental hypothesis, chiefly in its Hegelian form, to the New Testament produced a tradition in

New Testament scholarship which even to the present regards the Gospels as the product, not of the chronicling of events by those in a position to evaluate them as historical, but of the preaching of the early Church. The consequent disparagement of their objective reliability could hardly react favorably upon Christian Education; in reality it resulted in shattered foundations.

The suggestion of a return to a norm may evoke a protest from some quarters. The idea that emancipation from the authority of the Christian Scriptures is a value is still deeply entrenched in much of American Protestantism. In this the children of darkness are wiser than the children of light; the revolutionary forces of our day, however defective their norms may be, recognize that those who would give direction to human life must not only know what they themselves believe, but also be able to project into society the principles by which they insist men must live. The cavalier disregard for consistency which marks the Communist movement is in itself a witness to its high evaluation of the power of ideas, even ideas held in the face of strong contrary evidence. What a contrast between this and the fiercely passionate desire of much of Christendom to be in accord, at any cost, with the latest fad of the scientific world! It is ironical that theologians have too frequently feared nothing so much as to be thought 'unscientific'.

Some will protest, it is true, that an age which seeks authority from any quarter whatever (even from a transcendental

source) is an age which has lost its nerve. Such a desire is, we are assured, the result of a temporary uncertainty engendered by the shocks which we have experienced since 1914. Given time, man will regain his grip upon himself. Is it possible that we have seen the entire picture of human confidence out of perspective? May it not be that it is man's self-confidence, and not his feeling of need for an authority outside and above himself, that is the symptom of cultural sickness?

In any event, the near future hardly promises to undergird, in Western society, a sense of human sufficiency. It is more probable that uncertainties will compound themselves. Men will in increasing numbers seek for some sure word through the mists of human uncertainty. The proponents of world revolution will not fail to exploit the possibilities of the situation. It is time that those who are responsible for the transmission of the Christian Evangel explored the possibilities of the proclamation of its certainties.

The realities of the times summon Christian educators to a new evaluation of their task of proclamation. Devotion to their Lord will scarcely do less than inspire a renewed devotion to the Scriptures which reveal Him. The emergency created by the appearance of revolutionary movements bent upon world conquest upon a radically anti-religious basis can hardly endorse the current unconcern for content, and can afford little aid and comfort to inefficiency in methodology.